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News Release



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Federal Action Initiated in Killing of Six Kit Foxes

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has instituted formal enforcement proceedings for the burial death of a family of six endangered kit foxes (*Vulpes macrotis mutica*) in Bakersfield last April.

The kit fox family, two adults and four pups, was found dead on April 28, buried alive in its den. The den was in a landscaped hillside next to a parking lot of the East Hills Mall. A number of openings had led into the den, which was being used by the kit fox family. The investigation concluded that each of these openings had been filled and closed over by Ted's Turf & Landscaping Maintenance, which provides landscape services to the mall.

The East Hills Mall cooperated fully with the Service in its investigation. No enforcement action is being taken by the Service against the mall. However, enforcement is being pursued against Ted's Turf & Landscaping Maintenance for its actions in covering the den openings. A formal Notice of Violation was issued, seeking civil penalties under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Kit foxes weigh four or five pounds. They are the smallest members of the canine family in the U.S., about the size of a house cat. They have big, triangular ears; long, skinny legs, and a large bushy tail with a black tip. Kit foxes eat large numbers of rodents, but in turn are preyed on by coyotes and non-native red foxes.

Kit foxes once were abundant in San Joaquin Valley. But human development reduced their numbers to the point where they were listed as endangered in 1967. In recent years, kit foxes have been seen in urbanizing areas on the fringes of Bakersfield, and residents have become more familiar with them and their patterns.

In addition to cooperating fully in the investigation, East Hills Mall also volunteered to implement several measures designed to increase awareness of wildlife protection. These include educational outreach as well as on-site operation and maintenance programs.

The killing was investigated by special agents of the Law Enforcement branch of the Service, which is responsible for protection of endangered species where parties harm or kill protected species. Law Enforcement also monitors the \$1.4 billion annual trade in wildlife for violations, such as import of species that can pose a threat to native plants and animals.

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.